HOUSTON HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

~~Recommendations~~ **Requirements for events and gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic**

- **Considerations for Events and Gatherings in Areas with High COVID-19 Circulation**
    - The more people an individual interacts with and the longer that interaction lasts, the higher the potential risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 and COVID-19 spreading
    - The higher the level of community transmission in the area that the gathering is being held, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spreading during a gathering

        Table 1: The risk of COVID-19 spreading at events and gatherings increases as follows

Lowest risk: Virtual-only activities, events, and gatherings.
More risk: Smaller outdoor and in-person gatherings in which individuals from different households remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, wear cloth face coverings, do not share objects, and come from the same local area (e.g., community, town, city, or county).
Higher risk: Medium-sized in-person gatherings that are adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and with attendees coming from outside the local area.
Highest risk: Large in-person gatherings where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and attendees travel from outside the local area.

- **State and Local Level**
    Texas. Governor Abbott issued Executive Order GA-29 on July 2 ordering the use of face masks in public to help slow the spread of COVID-19 as new infections and hospitalizations are surging and deaths begin to mount. This comes after the Executive Order GA-29 on June 26 to close bars, halt further reopening and delay elective surgeries in eight of the state's hardest hit counties.
    Harris County. Harris County upgraded to a ***Level 1: Stay Home*** on June 26*.* Level one signifies a severe and uncontrolled level of COVID-19 in Harris County, meaning outbreaks are present and worsening and that testing, and contact tracing capacity is strained or exceeded. At this level, residents take action to minimize contacts with others wherever possible and avoid leaving home except for the most essential needs like going to the grocery store for food and medicine.
    Houston. Houston is now among the national epicenters of current COVID-19 outbreaks. The Houston area has experienced a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases since Memorial Day. Now, COVID-19 infections are three times greater than they were at the

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peak experienced earlier this spring. Currently, due to the spike in COVID-19 cases, accompanied by a steady rise in hospitalizations since the lifting of the restrictions intended to contain the virus, the risk of COVID-19 spreading at large in-person gatherings is at the **Highest Risk** (Table 1).

- **National and State Conventions Falls into the Highest Risk Event Category because:**
  o   It is a large in-person gathering (estimated 6,000 attendees)
  o   It is difficult to maintain social distancing over several days
  o   It has attendees travel from outside the local area

The recommendations below are intended to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection and spread, both in Houston during national and state conventions and beyond as attendees return to their hometowns. Even with intense recommendations, the convention remains at best a in the **Higher Risk** category.

- **~~Recommendations~~ Requirements for Event Organizers**
  o   Promote behaviors that prevent spread
      ▪   ~~Instruct registered attendees to stay home if they~~Restrict entry to any attendees who ~~-~~have tested positive for COVID-19, if they do not feel well or have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 between July 2-15 (fourteen days prior to the convention start date).
      ▪   Encourage attendees to travel by car and not air or public transit to minimize close contact with others.
      ▪   Encourage attendees to limit travel companions to ~~only those~~ 1 or 2 attending the convention and not bring friends and family members.
      ▪   Enforce the Governor's executive order on the use of face coverings (masks) or face shields if face coverings are not possible. Those who do not comply will be removed.
          •   Use of face coverings is particularly important in setting where people may raise their voice (i.e. shouting, chanting, singing).
          •   Proper use includes covering both the mouth and the nose and must be worn at all times.
      ▪   Communicate and reinforce practicing hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
      ▪   Ensure adequate supplies are easily available to support healthy hygiene behavior. Supplies include soap, water, hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol),

paper towels, tissues, disinfectant wipes, face coverings and no-touch trash cans.

- Ensure venue and hotel contracts include extra staff for enhanced cleaning and supplies in restroom areas. Staff must be screened upon start of shift.
- Ensure touchless hand sanitizing stations are present throughout venue and available within each meeting and breakout room.

- Post signs or posters and promote messaging about behaviors that prevent spread.
  - Signage should include messaging about hand hygiene, social distancing, and face coverings
  - Signage should be readily visible. Consider placing these near in every sign-in table, bathrooms, entrances/exits, dining areas, escalators, shuttles, hotels, and any other high trafficked area or where people may congregate.
- Provide attendees and staff with materials to promote the daily practice of everyday preventive actions to help prevent spread of the virus.
- Discourage actions such as handshakes, fist bumps, and high-fives at events.
- Maintain healthy environments
  - Intensify cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces.
  - Modify layouts to promote social distance of at least 6 feet between people:
    - Limit attendance, seating capacity, or host smaller events in larger rooms
    - Use multiple entrances and exits and discourage crowded waiting areas
    - Block off rows or sections of seating in order to space people 6 ft apart in all directs (left, right, back and front).
    - Eliminate lines and encourage distancing by providing signs/visual cues
      - Include monitoring at break stations, restrooms, and other areas where gathering may occur
    - Prioritize outdoor activities if social distancing can be maintained
    - Offer online attendance options to help reduce the number of attendees
  - Install physical barriers and guides to support social distancing.
    - Registration and check-in areas should incorporate protective barriers (e.g. acrylic barrier screens, portable counter barriers, dividers, etc.)
  - Close communal spaces, or stagger use and clean and disinfect between use.

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- Serve individually plated meals/grab-and-go options; hold activities in separate areas.
  - Ensure dining space includes socially distanced layout
- Use disposable food service items including utensils and dishes.
- Use touchless payment options for food and other items. Where not available, contact should be minimized.
- Limit sharing of objects, and/or clean and disinfect between use.
- Limit the use of elevators and ensure stairways are available for use; disinfect regularly touched surfaces.
- Ensure adequate supplies to minimize sharing (pens, note pads, pencils, etc.)
- Encourage attendees to use transportation options that minimize close contact with others (e.g., walking or biking, driving or riding by car – alone or with household members only).
- If transport vehicles like buses are used by the event staff, drivers should practice all safety actions and protocols as indicated for other staff.
- Consider limiting the number of people who occupy the restroom at one time to allow for social distancing; do not allow lines or crowds to form near the restroom.
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and if possible, increase circulation of outdoor air. If portable ventilation equipment like fans are used, take steps to minimize air from them blowing from one person directly at another person.
- Take steps to ensure that all water systems and features are safe to use. Encourage staff and attendees to bring their own water to minimize touching and use of water fountains; if drinking fountains are used make sure they are cleaned and sanitized.

- Maintain healthy operations
  - Protect people at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19
  - Consider ways to significantly reduce the number of attendees; stagger or rotate scheduling
  - Create static groups or "cohorts" of individuals and avoid mixing between groups.
  - Pursue virtual events and meetings; replace in-person meetings with video- or tele-conference calls whenever possible.
  - Limit non-essential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations, especially with those who are not from the local area
  - Consider options for non-essential travel in accordance with state and local regulations
  - Consider limiting event attendance to staff and guests who live in the local area
  - Implement flexible and non-punitive leave policies

- Train staff on all safety protocols, preferably virtually to ensure social distancing.
- Conduct daily health checks such as temperature screening or symptom checking on all staff and attendees.
- Use wrist bands to validate daily health checks
- Designate a COVID-19 point of contact
- Keep a track of attendees by sections (e.g. signing sheets, scanning, etc.).
- Keep a master list of all attendees that includes the following information: name, DOB, address, phone number, email address, hotel and hotel room.
- Put in place communication systems for:
  - Individuals to self-report COVID-19 symptoms, a positive test for COVID-19, or exposure to someone with COVID-19
  - Notifying local health authorities of COVID-19 cases
  - Notifying individuals of any COVID-19 exposures while maintaining confidentiality in accordance with privacy laws

o Prepare for when someone gets sick
  - Maintain a contact list of all convention attendees including name, home address, home or cell phone, and email address. Be prepared to share list with local public health and work with public health if attendees are confirmed as positive in the two weeks after the convention.
  - Maintain a sign in list of all attendees at each individual session, breakout room, or other convention event.
  - Have a plan to isolate and safely transport those who are sick.
    - Designate a space for staff and attendees who may become sick and cannot leave the event immediately.
    - Work with partners, such as local hospitals and hotels, to create a plan for treating and isolating staff and attendees who do not live nearby.
    - Include a plan for separating and caring for vulnerable populations (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html).
    - If any staff member or participant becomes sick at your event, separate them from others as soon as possible.
    - Establish procedures to help sick staff or participants leave the event as soon as possible. Provide them with clean, disposable facemasks (https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/ pdfs/UnderstandDifferenceInfographic-508.pdf) to wear, if available.
    - Work with the local public health department and nearby hospitals to care for those who become sick.

- If needed, contact emergency services for those who need emergency care. Public transportation, shared rides, and taxis should be avoided for sick persons, and disposable facemasks should be worn by persons who are sick at all times when in a vehicle.
- Read more about preventing the spread of COVID-19 if someone is sick. (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-whensick.html).
  - Attendees who develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 during the convention or in the two weeks following the convention must notify convention organizers who will then coordinate with local public health in Houston and in the attendee's local jurisdiction.
  - Encourage individuals who are sick to follow CDC guidance for caring for oneself and others who are sick.
  - Notify local health officials of any case of COVID-19 while maintaining confidentiality.
  - Notify those who have had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 and advise them to quarantine and self-monitor for symptoms and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
  - Advise individuals who are sick when it would be safe for them to return based on CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation.
  - Close off areas used by someone who is sick. Wait >24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting.
  - After the event
    - When returning home aAttendees must should be advised to quarantine for 14 days and self-monitor for symptoms and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.

References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Considerations for Events and Gatherings. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Implementation of Mitigation Strategies for Communities with Local COVID-19 Transmission https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/community-mitigation.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Interim Guidance: Get Your Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

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https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/Mass-Gatherings-Document_FINAL.pdf

Opening the State of Texas DSHS Website.

https://www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/
https://www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/opentexas.aspx#protocols

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